

On the Soap Box

# America Must Call a Halt to 'Racial Snobbery'

By ROBERT J. CAPENER

RECENTLY, YOUR pages have been filled with indictments of education at the university and what Karl Meyer so aptly termed "jellyfish" attitudes. Everyone wants to take a crack the status quo and I am no exception. The following statements represent considerable thought on my part in an effort to capture the underlying fault of our culture.

Students of human behavior are making a determined effort to apply the scientific process to their problems. This process would exclude a judgement of right or wrong. It is necessary to have such clinical objectivity, but it is equally necessary to determined a dynamic code of life in order to eliminate damaging behavior.

The only valid basis on which to judge such behavior would be whether or not it is harmful to society as a whole. Using this standard, we must place the stigma of unwholesomeness on the American ethnocentric practice commonly called "racial snobbery".



IN 1944, WE had American military personnel scattered all over the world. The war, and the subsequent period of occupation, was our golden opportunity to spread our own peculiar gospel of capitalism and democracy, and to gain friends for the future. We had to set an example. We had to present a 24-hour-a-day drama entitled, "American Culture in Action".

I saw the performance our players put on in several sections of the world, primarily in India. We were bad actors, and the play was a floperoo. This was particularly unfortunate because every member of the audience was a watchful critic.

We ridiculed everything about the Indian way of life; their clothing, their primitive industry, their customs, religions, poverty, and their illnesses. (Yes, even elephantiasis was an object of scorn and amusement.) We were happy about the Indian boy who piped "Deep In the Heart of Texas" on his toy horn, and we gave him money. We ignored, or worse yet, laughed at, the holy man with fly-bedeveled, sightless eyes.

A nation of beggars, we called them. They were niggers, wogs, and gooks. We went on three day drunks in Calcutta and Karachi, drank their gin, flooded their gutters with vomit, and reached manhood via their venereal diseases. We held them up to the American standard of culture and found them wanting. This was our racial snobbery.

WE ARE SURPRISED and dismayed to discover that others dislike and distrust us. This antipathy not only wounds our national ego, but it is a serious threat to our security.

India occupies a strategic position in the East, and will some day be a powerful nation and a vital ally. They are still suspicious following their experience at the hands of another Anglo-Saxon people. They cannot be censured if they refuse to cater to our wishes. There is apparently nothing in common between their nation and ours, not even human understanding and kindness.

The tragic part of the whole thing is that our snobbery is not limited to India alone. We spread it liberally over the world. We are approaching the point where we will alienate every other nation, and then we can stand and watch our dream crack at the seams and disappear, while we wonder what happened.

OUR EMPHASIS SEEMS to be on cultural superiority, although there is a definite element of racial pridefulness, despite the acceptance of our mongrelization. This snobbery is a myth and a dangerous one. It is not difficult to understand where it came from. It began when the first settlers moved to these shores and set up their own brand of culture. Since that time we have made remarkable progress of which we are rightfully proud.

But now, every bit of reading material, every radio program, every movie flatters our standard of living and exalts our way of life. We cannot help but assimilate this egoism. We wallow in this bath of narcissism, and emerge with every pore clogged with snobbery.

There is little point in discussing the gravity of our present situation. We need friends more than ever before, contrary to General MacArthur's "go it alone" policy. The nations must cease fighting and begin to untangle the mess together or the entire works will blow up in our faces.

WE CAN HELP by changing our attitude toward others. We must learn to accept other cultures as they are, without judgement. We cannot accomplish this by reading the National Geographic every month. We must re-educate ourselves. We must not think of another culture as being an inferior one; we must regard it merely as a different one.

If we can attain this new attitude, our 24-hour-a-day drama will be more pleasing, and we can enjoy an unlimited series of performances. We could then call our play, "Tolerance".